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FM AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3368

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 REYKJAVIK 000203

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DEPT FOR EUR/NB, EUR/PPD, L/HHR, L/PM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/17/2017

TAGS: PTER PREL PHUM NATO KPAO IC

SUBJECT: Icelandic MFA announces inquiry into alleged CIA detainee flights

Classified By: DCM Neil Klopfenstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Iceland's Minister for Foreign Affairs announced on June 27 that her ministry will conduct an inquiry into allegations of CIA detainee flights transiting Iceland. The announcement comes in response to the June 27 Council of Europe discussion of Special Rapporteur Dick Marty's latest report, and statements by Iceland's leading opposition parliamentarian, who attended the session in Strasbourg. MFA officials have tried to minimize the inquiry's significance in conversations with Post, describing it as "an exercise in transparency" and an attempt to take the issue away from the opposition. They report that the inquiry's form and scope are still yet to be defined, though Iceland's ambassador in Strasbourg has approached the COE Human Rights and Legal Affairs Committee for assistance. Post has not been officially approached by the MFA on the topic; we would expect any such inquiry closer to the opening of the new parliamentary session in October. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On June 27, Icelandic state television's evening news covered the Council of Europe (COE) Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) session on COE Special Rapporteur Dick Marty's most recent report on alleged CIA activities in COE member states. The report prominently featured comments by Left-Green Party Chair Steingrimur Sigfusson, who was in attendance. Sigfusson, the head of Iceland's largest opposition party, said that while he was not surprised by most of the report's findings, he was nonetheless concerned about the finding that NATO had purportedly authorized such measures in October 2001. He called for the Icelandic Government to report on Iceland's role in any such NATO decision.

¶3. (U) In response, Foreign Minister Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladottir (traveling in Africa) instructed the MFA to issue a press release that evening announcing that in light of the report's findings, she had decided that "landings by certain aircraft at Keflavik and/or Reykjavik Airports should be taken under closer examination." The press release further stated that the Icelandic Government had fully answered all questions presented to it by the Marty inquiry, and that the MFA "has no knowledge of any flights operated by the U.S. intelligence services carrying prisoners

or suspected terrorists in Icelandic airspace or at Keflavik Airport. The U.S. Government has never requested overflight or landing permission for such aircraft."

¶4. (C) MFA Counselor Finnur Thor Birgisson, who drafted the press release for the Ministry's Political Department, told PolOff on June 29 that things "are still at a very early stage" regarding the MFA's plans for looking into the issue. MFA Defense Department Counselor Fridrik Jonsson, also present at the meeting, was quick to add that the announcement was mostly for domestic consumption as a move to "clip the wings" of LG Chair Sigfusson before he had an opportunity to create further problems for the Minister. Birgisson agreed, saying the inquiry is the Ministry's effort to be seen as transparent on the matter. Questions may eventually be directed to the USG, but for now "the important part is to be seen as doing something."

¶5. (C) The MFA's Counselor for Human Rights reiterated this message in a meeting with PolOff on July 3, describing the ministry's effort as "an exercise in transparency." She drew PolOff's attention to the specific language in the press release ("examination" vice "investigation"), underscoring that the MFA had no plans nor authority to conduct a formal investigation in a legal sense. She further reported that she had just finished speaking to Iceland's ambassador in Strasbourg per FM Gisladottir's instructions to approach the PACE Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee for assistance in formulating the inquiry. The MFA's impression is that the committee's handling of the matter thus far has been

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"puzzling," and the Ministry does not hold high expectations that it will get much useful information from these discussions. (The FM's Political Advisor noted in the press on July 12 that the MFA did not expect a substantive response in Strasbourg until September, "after people's summer holidays.")

¶6. (C) Post has not been formally approached by the MFA on the matter thus far, and MFA officials have said they do not know if or when that might happen. The Icelandic Government last asked for a formal U.S. Government response on the topic in fall 2005, and Prime Minister Geir Haarde (then Foreign Minister) has on multiple occasions declared himself satisfied with Secretary Rice's statement regarding detainee issues

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on December 5, 2005 (reftels). Embassy Reykjavik last received a press inquiry on this issue in October 2006, at which time we declined comment. Press reporting so far has been straightforward, though an editorial cartoon in leading daily Morgunbladid on July 4 lampooned the Foreign Minister's intent to conduct the inquiry, depicting her at the airport with a pair of binoculars looking for planes with "prisoner stripes."

¶7. (C/NF) Comment: FM Gisladottir is in a difficult situation stemming from her party's past criticism of the GOI on the issue of detainee flights. During the campaign for the May 2007 parliamentary elections, she committed herself and her party to transparency and cooperation with the Althingi (parliament) on foreign affairs and as such will need to demonstrate an effort to investigate the issue. Her quick decision to announce a further investigation of alleged detainee flights is a direct result of this pressure from her erstwhile allies in opposition, the Left-Greens. Her announcement will effectively quash the issue until

the Althingi comes back into session in October. At that point, however, opposition parliamentarians will likely use the issue to snipe at the government and push for some results from the inquiry. We anticipate that press inquiries to the Embassy, if any, will ask us to comment on the allegations in the COE reports as they pertain to Iceland and to outline our response to any Icelandic Government query on the matter. In such an event Post intends to coordinate our response with appropriate Washington offices.

Klopfenstein